

EPHEMERA: INVESTIGATIONS OF NATURE AND NURTURE THROUGH GLASS

A thesis exhibition presented to the faculty of the graduate school of  
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the  
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By

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## ABSTRACT

## EPHEMERA: INVESTIGATIONS OF NATURE AND NUTURE THROUGH GLASS

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Western Carolina University, (November 2010)

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I articulate my thoughts in the language of glass. I have dedicated myself to the technical and conceptual understanding of this material for the past nine years. I am drawn to glass as a conceptual artist because of the dichotomies the medium presents. Glass can be liquid or solid, transparent or opaque, strong or fragile. Glass as an art object can be incredibly precious, while in industrial applications it is considered disposable. It is a material that we use so frequently in our daily lives that it is almost invisible. Although glass has an ancient history, it is also used in cutting edge technology. In my work I seek to expose the many aspects of this protean material and its similarities to human strength and fragility.

Conceptually this body of work deals with by issues surrounding identity and how we come to be who we are, through both nature and nurture. I am particularly interested in the impact of the family system on the individual identity. In an effort to explore these issues, I have created a body of work that explores my own genealogy as well as my own nature through glass sculpture, incorporating family photographs and found objects.

I create with found objects that have outlived their owners and have had multiple lifetimes. I am intrigued by objects that I can use to create new contexts and metaphors in their exhibition. These works represent my interest in memory, perception and time. My approach to these concepts is based in my own brand of "science". The creation of these objects and their

subsequent display represent my attempt to understand the ways my ancestry and nurture have shaped my identity.

## INTRODUCTION

I am interested in the application of the scientific method to circumstances that are not applicable to science. I chose to title my exhibition “Ephemera,” which in this case describes the transitory nature of human lives and experience. Through this thesis work I am investigating identity as the product of both nature and nurture. I am specifically investigating my own concepts of identity through engagement with images of my ancestors.

I am interested in the underlying ideas behind human identity related to nature and conditioning. I am also interested in how these perceptions of nature and nurture change with age and experience. My thesis investigations are object-based sculptures, based in empirical processes that study the intangible aspects of human experience.

“Ephemera” combines my interest in science and humanity. I have used myself and my own family as test subjects in my “experiments”. The use of my own family is divorced from sentimentality and yet evokes immediate emotional responses from the viewer. I use my own connections and personal experiences of love, loss, fear and faith to begin a silent conversation with my audience. Images of my grandmother become universal symbols for elders, for which viewers may substitute their own stories. Through this invisible conversation, i communicate with my viewers about the unnamable mystery that is human experience.

Making myself the subject of my experiments, I have attempted to lead a thorough and honest investigation into my genetic makeup as well as my upbringing. The following paper and the exhibition it documents are the results of my inquiries. I have chosen to articulate these ideas primarily using glass sculpture, cast aluminum and found objects.

## GLASS INVESTIGATIONS

Creating for me may be either sculpting non-functional forms from molten glass or using traditional glassblowing techniques to create functional glassware which I will use conceptually. I am as interested in the concept of the container as I am in the actual specimen that is to be contained. I actually view most things in this world as containers: people become containers for their experiences; buildings become containers for people. For me, the essence of containment comes in the form of a bottle, hence my affection for this particular form. Bottles are the ultimate container, and the form itself is loaded with cultural meanings and identifiers. Bottles can reference medicine, alcohol, Molotov cocktails or messages from distant strangers.

My conceptual interest in collecting combines with my formal training and knowledge of off-hand glassblowing. Glass is one of the few natural or manmade materials that, when used as a container, will not react with its contents. This characteristic of glass makes it ideal for laboratory use as test tubes and beakers, where specimens must remain free from contaminants. I appropriate this scientific apparatus in my own work, which references scientific method and empirical processes. Combining glass and other found objects I create experiments with the intent of revealing the intangible aspects of human existence.

In the case of those works in which glass is the focal point, I sculpt and blow functional forms. At other times, I wish the glass to be an invisible vessel; and in this instance I rely on industrial glass. The uniformity of the manufactured pieces allows them to fade into the context of the other elements of the work. In both instances, the glass performs a particular function.



Figure 1. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Memory Magnified* (Detail),  
Blown glass, family photographs and water, 2010.

## GLASS PROCESSES

The ancient art of glassblowing requires a commitment of at least 10 years of consistent training to understand the basics, and a lifetime to master. Glassblowing is a tremendously time consuming activity, driven by process. I am enthralled with the processes involved in glass working. As a glass artist it is necessary for me to understand the chemical and molecular aspects of the material. It has also been necessary for me to further my education in glass equipment building and maintenance in order to keep producing glass.

I am attracted to the inherent difficulty and danger associated with working with a 2100 degree Fahrenheit material. Handling glass requires all of one's attention and focus; but regardless of the skill and mastery brought to bear, there are times when one cannot save a piece from destruction. This material will explode in your hands, melt and collapse under its own weight and self-destruct in the most unexpected ways. Glass breaks, and my knowledge of the fragility of this material has informed my work. My acceptance of the fragility of glass allows me to investigate destruction as process. At a certain point, I began to take glass apart. I became interested in intentionally failing, and creating something from that failure. I was interested in dissolving the attributes of glass through reductive processes.

I am drawn to glass as a conceptual artist because of the dichotomies the medium presents: liquid or solid, transparent or opaque, strong or fragile. Glass can also be incredibly precious, while in industrial applications it is considered disposable. It is a material that we use so frequently in our daily lives that it is almost invisible. In my work I seek to exploit the many aspects of this material and its significance in human culture. Using glass to magnify aspects of human experience and culture, for instance, I pair glass with water, which possesses similar properties of magnification. I also use light and reflection in these works, particularly exploring natural light.

*Growth/Decay Study* (Figure 2.) is a piece that uses subtractive processes to disassemble and evaluate the material. *Growth/Decay Study* comprises six found mirrors that I meticulously sandblasted to bore holes from the surface to the core of the objects.



Figure 2. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Growth/Decay Study*, Found and altered glass, 18" x 12" in., 2010.



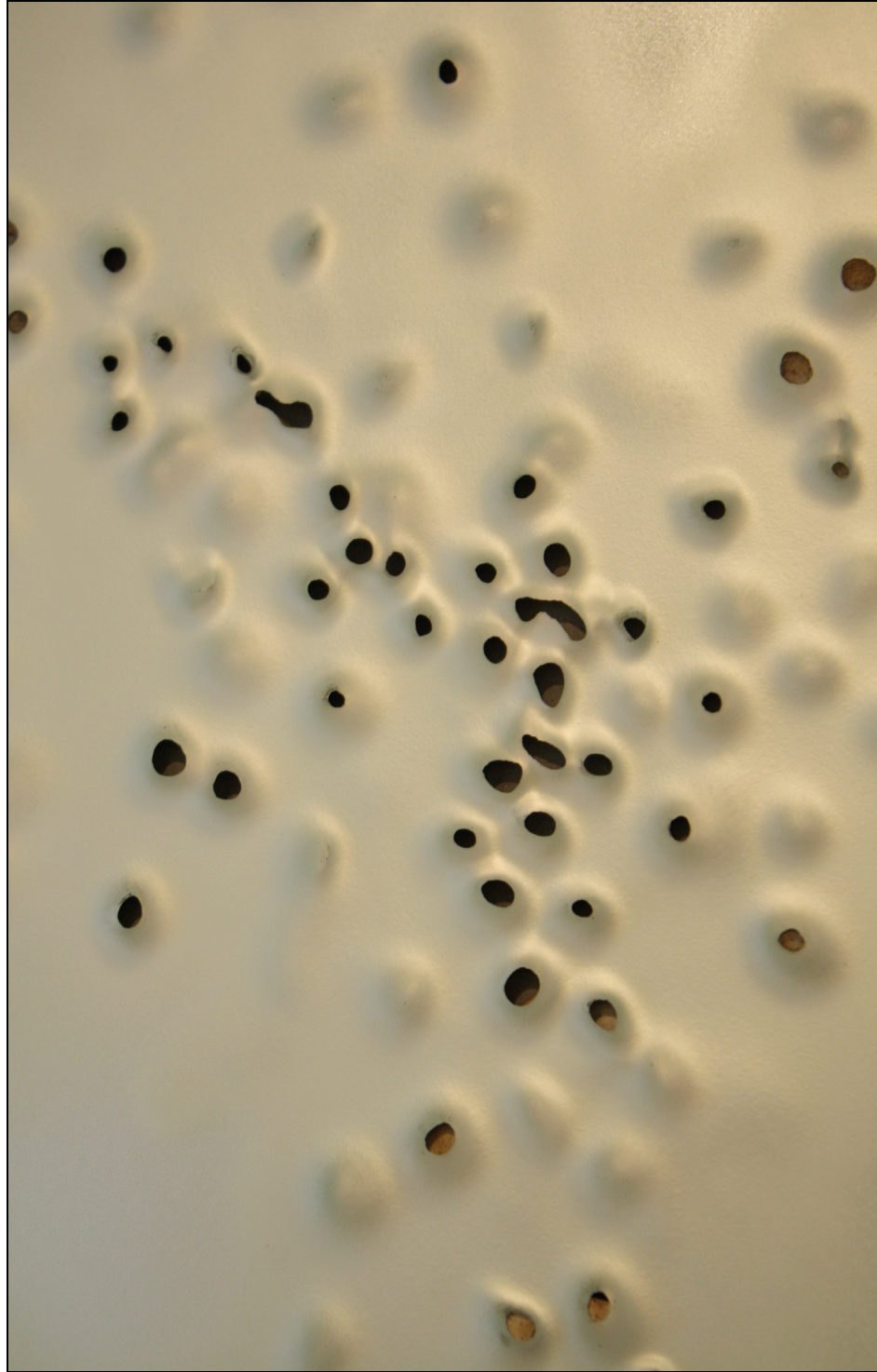


Figure 3. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Growth/Decay Study* (Detail),  
Found and altered glass, 2010.



In this investigation, the conventional utility of the object is destroyed. It is through this destruction that we are also able to gain a better understanding of how the object works. The sandblasting of the mirrors exposes layers that are not otherwise visible. It is through the denial of its use, that the identity of the material is exposed.

In addition to general glassblowing processes, and using cold working techniques to deconstruct the material, I have also developed processes for altering found glass. In my journeys as a collector, I have scavenged hundreds of antique medicine bottles. These bottles are all made of different glasses and are technically not compatible with the Spruce Pine batch we use at the studio at the Jackson County Green Energy Park. Technically this means that the two glasses will not fuse together without breaking. In order to transform the medicine bottles, I brought them up to a working temperature of 920 degrees Fahrenheit over 4 hours in an annealing oven. I then picked up the bottles one by one with a temporary punty. This temporary attachment allowed me to heat the glass in the glory hole. I then inflated the softened forms, which were originally blown in a mold, and dramatically changed the shape, while keeping the integrity of the original form. Many of these bottles have retained their lettering as well as minor industrial imprints. Altering the glass in this way fundamentally changes the form from one that has been pressed and molded by machine, to something that is created by my hand.



Figure 4. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Specimens* (Detail of altered medicine bottles). Altered antique medicine bottles, family photographs (high fire decals), and water, 2010.



Figure 5. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Specimens* (Detail of altered medicine bottles).  
Found and altered antique medicine bottles, 2010.

My work with found objects provides a balance to painstaking processes I use to make glass. These interests have always coexisted, but they have recently taken on a new direct relationship in my work. It has been through the work for my thesis exhibition "Ephemera," that I have been able to make a context within which these objects can live together. My goal in the installation of these sculptures was to have a seamless interplay between the found and created objects. In order to combine the collected and created objects, the assemblage and subsequent display of all of these components was of vital importance.

## AMERICAN STUDIO GLASS

An artist's ability to work with particular materials has taken different forms over time. Painting has traditionally been at the top of the hierarchy, while craft based media were relegated to a lower position. Nowhere is this more evident than in glass. Although glass has a 5000-year-old history and has been integral to the development of human culture, its position in this hierarchy has varied throughout the centuries. Only recently has glass found favor in contemporary art as a medium for sculpture.

Prior to the beginning of the American Studio Glass movement in 1962, glass was primarily considered an industrial material, almost totally limited to factory environments. American glass artist and educator Harvey Littleton (1922- ), was responsible for bringing glass and glass artists out of the factory environment and into a studio art setting. Having been exposed to the drama of glassmaking during his childhood in Corning, New York, Littleton pursued the goal of moving glassmaking into educational institutions and private studios. He worked with his peers and with his students to develop ways of making glass that used current technology in a smaller setting.

Littleton and his followers united glass craftsmen from around the world and legitimized the material as an art form. Three generations later, as contemporary glass blowers measure their history, I am part of a huge international movement that has assumed its rightful place in contemporary art. The university-educated generation of glass artists before me challenged the previously limited notions that separated fine art from craft. I am grateful to my predecessors for enabling me to dedicate my life to this material in the pursuit of fine art.

While it is not uncommon to see contemporary sculptors collaborating with skilled glass workers, it is not unusual for artists like American Josiah McElheny (1966- ), who are themselves master glassblowers, to compete for a slice of the contemporary art market. McElheny has dedicated the much of his life to acquiring the skills of a master glass craftsman. The difference between McElheny and the traditional glass worker is his ability to use his skills to create contempo-

rary sculptures. These sculptures discuss our perceptions of time and are often based in concepts related to modernity.

McElheny uses traditional glass forms like the bottle to create content, stretching the conventional boundaries of the container as subject matter. In *Endless Repeating Twentieth Century Modernism*, (Figure 6.), McElheny creates a mirrored surface on his glass objects and then encloses them in a mirrored display. The reflections of his glass objects appear to repeat infinitely, distorting our perception of space and time.



Figure 6. Josiah McElheny, *Endless Repeating Twentieth Century Modernism*, Blown and mirrored glass, 2002.

Like McElheny, I use the fundamental properties of glass to create content. For this reason I chose to work with mainly clear glass for my thesis exhibition: concentrating on clear glass enabled me to focus on the inherent qualities of the material. In these investigations I took advantage of the natural abilities of clear glass to magnify, transmit light, and simply be transparent.

A prime example in my use of the ability of glass to magnify and capture light is seen in the piece *Memory Magnified* (Figure 7). In this work I illustrate memory by using glass and water to both magnify and illuminate images of my family.



Figure 7. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Memory Magnified*,  
Bottles range in size from 6"x3" to 12"x 6" in. 2010.,

## OBJECTS AND COLLECTING

I have a love affair with objects. From a very young age I have collected things as my way of holding onto moments. Memories are locked away inside physical objects, which become vessels for the unexplainable magic of being. Objects have the ability to live many lifetimes and remain timeless.

I grew up in a huge family in Chicago. My childhood consisted of urban adventures, like walking with my brothers along train tracks looking for treasures and finding our own ghetto version of nature. Abandoned buildings and houses were my favorite hangouts. I would scour burned down buildings and abandoned lots for clues, trying to discover what happened there. I also found myself haunting graveyards, looking for some sort of explanation of the identity of the dead on the wind or in the script on the headstone. I was always collecting experiences, narratives, objects and memories.

My childhood was full of friends who were not children. I was particularly fond of the grandmas of my neighborhood, and I could sit for hours collecting their stories of struggle and triumph, infinite loss, love, fear and faith. I immersed myself in the stories of my ancestors on both sides of my family. Weekly visits with my extended family provided me with extensive fuel for my imagination, enabling me to further construct an understanding of the identity of each member of our family, present and deceased.

*"Ephemera"* represents my interest in memory, perception, dreams and time. Collections of objects tell stories that outlive their owners. These objects become imbued with meaning and often reveal real or invented histories. My recent work focuses on objects that have had multiple lifetimes. These objects are remarkable because they have taken on their own existence,



outside of use and ownership. I use glass and metal to exemplify the sacred in the most mundane of things.

“Ephemera” is a direct reference to Victorian cabinets of curiosity and Hamiltonian case, which showcased their owners’ collections of numerous natural oddities and cultural artifacts. Like these glass display cases, my work creates a new landscape akin to the topography of my mind.



Figure 8. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Specimens*,  
Found and altered glass, blown and hot sculpted glass, aluminum castings,  
natural and manmade specimens, 2010.

We are all living collections of memory, experiences, and genetics. As a collector of things, I enjoy nothing more than experiencing the collections of others. I am also influenced profoundly by the gathered experiences of groups of people, particularly family units.

*UHF* (Figure 9.) is my own investigation into memory and ancestry. Gutting an antique television, I was able to replace its electrical components with a dreamscape, combining broken glass, bleached root systems with found and altered bottles. The sculptural object becomes an environment, as the viewer visually explores the depths of the piece. Although the topography is not natural, its surreal environment consists largely of natural elements. The images in the glass bottles are taken from family photos and depicting extended family members whom I did not know personally. The enigmatic atmosphere produced by the combination of materials and light creates an otherworldly environment for these images. Although I would not be here if it were not for this lineage, I have no experiences of these people other than the stories that have been passed down to me... My lack of specific information about these relatives, allowed me to create a non-space for them to occupy.



Figure 9. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *UHF (Detail)*, Found and altered objects, glass and water 40" x 28" in., 2010.





Figure 10. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *UHF*,  
Found and altered objects, glass and water 40" x 28" in., 2010.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORIES

In addition to personal objects, my family ancestry was relayed to me through archival photographs. I was fortunate in that both sides of my family had extensive documentation and photographic evidence of our ancestry. As a child my great grandmother showed me these photographs and told me stories of our family history. I have since discovered that I am the only one who knows these stories. Now as an adult I am a living family archive. I feel a deep sense of responsibility for this history because it is only through these relics that my ancestors live on. Although I never knew these people, I know their stories, and their blood runs through my veins. Our lives are inextricably intertwined.

I am currently using many family photographs in my work by applying them directly to the glass with decals. The decals are made using a laser jet printer and are fired on to the surface of the glass in a kiln. The iron in the printer ink is responsible for transferring the image to the glass. Appropriately, the iron also relates to my work conceptually in the connections I have made to blood and family. This idea of bloodlines underlies the work in "Ephemera".



Figure 11. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Life-support* (Detail),  
Blown glass, copper, family photographs, found IV stand, and medical tubing, 2010.





Figure 12. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Mortality*, Cast glass, watch gears and hands (impregnated hot into the glass), wood, 12" x 30" in., 2010.



Figure 13. *Mortality* (Detail), Hot cast glass, photograph, watch gears and hands (impregnated hot into surface of glass), and wood. 12" x 30" in., 2010.

## CONCEPTUAL INFLUENCES

There is perhaps no contemporary artist that has not been impacted by the work of French American artist Marcel Duchamp (1887 – 1968). Duchamp was a painter early on in his career, but he is probably best known for his “ready-made” sculptures, objects that Duchamp found and designated as art. *Bicycle Wheel*, (Figure 14.) Is an example of one of Duchamp's first Ready-mades. The work is a found bicycle wheel, attached upside down to a wooden stool.

*Bicycle Wheel*, like the other Ready-mades created by Duchamp, asserted that art could be created by an artist merely by designating an object as such. Works such as *Bicycle Wheel* contested the world's notions about the importance of craftsmanship in fine art. Duchamp created conceptual art, broadening the possibilities for artist and audience and liberating art from being valued purely for aesthetics.



Figure 14. Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, Metal bicycle wheel, wooden stool, 42 x 24. in., 1913.

Marcel Duchamp paved the way for an entire genre of art using found objects and his virtual abandonment of painting, and investment in sculpture, also impacted Western Art. Sculpture became a more valid vehicle of contemporary art and no longer took a back seat to painting.

As a sculptor working a century after Duchamp's Ready-mades, I can scarcely imagine Contemporary Art without his contributions. Duchamp enabled concepts to become the artists medium. Duchamp's challenge of the conventions of painting has inspired me to challenge the conventions of my chosen medium, glass. Duchamp used found glass in the mixed media sculpture, *The Large Glass/The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors/Even*, which he worked on from 1915-1923. (Figure 15.) *The Large Glass* combines two large panes of glass, paint, foil, and wire in a single complex assemblage. Duchamp's use of glass as a prefabricated industrial material in fine art paved the way for glass as a medium to step out of the limited range of craft and enabled glass to be used as a medium for sculpture. Duchamp's exploration of mixed media coupled with his advancement of conceptual art made it possible for me to work in glass and found objects as a sculptor.

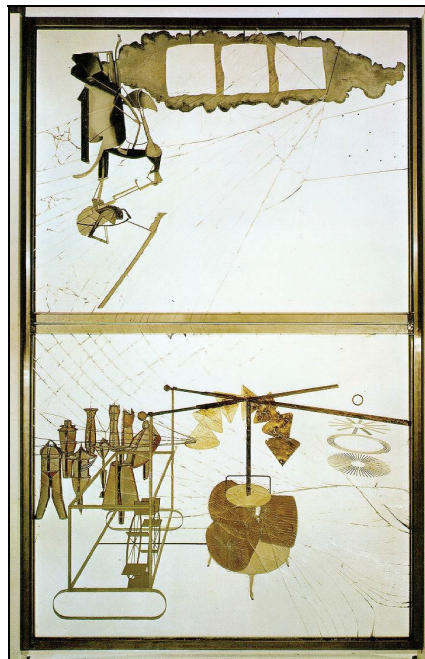


Figure 15. Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors/Even*, Found glass and mixed media, 109.25" x 69.25" in., 1915-1923.

I am also particularly interested in the work of German born American sculptor, Kiki Smith (1954 - ). Smith investigates humanity through her own personal identity. I am attracted to her brutal sense of simultaneous vulnerability and strength. Smith often depicts the human body as a direct reference to our mortality and our often repellant biological processes. Making the human body at once enchanted and abhorrent, she approaches each piece with a simultaneous irreverence and veneration. For Smith, the human body becomes the ideal vehicle to explore the dichotomy of human strength and fragility.



Figure 16. Kiki Smith, *Glass Stomach*,  
Mold blown glass, 1980-2005.

Smith has a unique ability to create an object or sculpture that seems to be possessed by its own particular spirit. Using her personal and familial history as a starting point, she collages biography with fantasy to create work that is imbued with symbolic references to real and created histories. Smith's sculpture embodies the concept that as each of us gets more personal through our work, our work also becomes more universal. Smith uses her own life, real and imagined, to conjure up notions of metaphorical allegories. She uses her fusion of personal experience with idealized allegory to discuss human nature with her audience. Smith's fearless investigations into her own human experiences have unveiled numerous human truths identifiable to the vast majority of viewers. By using the human body to discuss our universal human fragility, she creates sculptures that speak to humanity as a whole; this is the aspect of Smith's work that I have attempted to approach through my thesis "Ephemera".

My sculpture *Reliquary* consists of a hot sculpted glass heart that is contained inside a lidded glass apothecary jar. The disembodied heart is flanked on either side by two tall glass towers filled with water. Inside each water column is a photograph of one of my grandmothers, each shown with one of her children. Each glass column has hot sculpted glass roses that begin to disintegrate into glass frit as they reach the bottom of the column. The glass heart symbolizes what keeps each of us alive, and in this particular circumstance, the glass heart represents the organ that ceased to work for each of my grandmothers. *Reliquary* began as a personal investigation of my own experiences of loss, but through the use of symbolism and the technique of assemblage, starts a larger conversation with my audience about a universal human experience.





Figure 17. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Reliquary*,  
Hot sculpted glass, found objects, photographs and high fire decals, 2010.

## ASSEMBLAGE

In combining found specimens with objects that I have created with my own hand, I am working in a three dimensional form of collage much as American sculptor Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) before me. Cornell's boxes are mixed media assemblages that are created out of altered and found objects and installed inside cases or boxes. The work, although small in scale, envelops the viewer and transports the viewer into Cornell's mindscape. Found objects made of glass appear in his boxes on a regular basis. Although he did not physically make the glass in his boxes, it is obvious through his use of the material that he has developed an advanced understanding of it. He frequently used glass as a transparent container, in the same way in which glass vials and beakers are used to contain specimens in science. Cornell's use of glass to contain samples and specimens is similar to my own; he avoided the general assumption that glassblowing is an industrial or craft based activity, since he was not physically making the glass. Despite not having made the glass in his boxes, it is obvious through his use of the material that he has developed an advanced understanding of it.

More and more contemporary sculptors are recognizing glass for its inherent possibilities as well as its capacity to be a metaphor for the dichotomy of human strength and fragility. The transparency and plasticity of hot glass allows for techniques and uses that most are unaware of. The limitless uses for this material in our mundane daily existence, coupled with its inherent limitations, make it the ideal material to discuss the human experience.



Figure 18. Joseph Cornell, *Untitled (soap bubble set)*,  
Mixed media construction, 12" x 18" in., 1947-1948.

I attribute much of Cornell's success to his ability to make order out of chaos. In my most recent work I employed similar techniques of order in my assemblage of objects and space. I frequently worked with sets of three, six and seven, creating repetitive patterns.



Figure 19. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Growth/Decay Study*,  
Found and altered glass, 18" x 12" in., 2010.



Figure 20. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Memory Magnified*, Bottles range in size from 6"x3" to 12"x 6" in., 2010.

At times I employed a grid pattern, as in the wall arrangement of the mirror for *Growth/Decay Study*. At other times I used a more organic configuration, as in *Memory Magnified*. When I work in this organic way, I am often unsure whether the concept for the piece was the found or created object. At other times the materials and the process of glass making encourage me to hunt for objects of curiosity, with natural or industrial origins.

I have also been influenced by the work of French American Sculptor, Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), who also created a unique context through her assemblage of created and found objects. I admire Bourgeois' ambiguity, and the way her open-ended conversation allows the meanings of her works to be in a state of constant flux. Her work that asks questions rather than providing answers this is what I seek to do with my current body of work. How are we influenced by nature and nurture? What are the results of environment and upbringing on individuals? In

what ways are our predispositions inescapable? What are our connections to one another within and outside of the family system? How does actual/perceived memory shape our awareness?

Bourgeois creates a context for her objects through which she invites her audience to physically enter the work. She makes the environment and every object that composes it, speak of some legend. Bourgeois illustrates her own emotional life with tremendous honesty, and her non-conventional methods of display, coupled with her technical skill, engage the audience in her personal history.

My thesis work relates most closely to "The Cells" created by Bourgeois. Bourgeois focused on many of the same questions pertaining to memories of childhood and family relationships that I have chosen to explore in my thesis exhibition. In "The Cells", she uses found and created objects to set a stage on which her emotional drama unfolds. I also admire the ability of Bourgeois to create complex themes and very complex subject matter, through the use of simple objects. I seek to emulate her ability to integrate found and created objects in complete harmony.



Figure 21. Louise Bourgeois, *Cell #5*,  
Glass spheres, industrial window glass, and mixed media, 10'x10'ft., 1990-1993.

The environments created by Bourgeois utilize glass in many forms on a large scale. In *Cell #5* she employs both industrial glass and blown glass spheres. This environment is constructed out of large glass window panes that look as if they were scavenged from an industrial wasteland. Bourgeois juxtaposes this found glass with enormous blown glass spheres, which are seated in wooden chairs around the interior perimeter of *Cell #5*. The immense windows enclose the space, defining the environment, while the massive blown glass spheres, become symbols for people. In this piece, Bourgeois demonstrates the diversity of glass as a sculpture material, while simultaneously drawing attention to it through its immense proportions. Through her use of glass on a dramatic scale, Bourgeois draws our attention to a material that is largely invisible to us, due to its commonplace existence in our daily lives.

Bourgeois again uses large scale glass in *Twelve Oval Mirrors*. This environment consists of two circles of chairs, each chair in the outer circle, facing a 20 foot tall mirror.





Figure 22. Louise Bourgeois, *Twelve Oval Mirrors*, Installation. 9'X 20'ft., 2007.

*Twelve Oval Mirrors*, is intended to be interactive. Members of the audience can choose any chair, and if they do, they will be confronted with either their own reflection or possibly with another person. *Twelve Mirrors* demonstrates beautifully that a combination of simple objects, in this case mirrors and chairs, can be combined to discuss complex themes.

I draw on the ability of Bourgeois to encourage the natural curiosity of the viewer to enter into my conceptual realm. Using large scale configurations of objects that also have a high level of minute detail, I reward my audience for taking the time to investigate these works more closely. Initially, I draw my audience in with scale similar to the exterior spaces of Bourgeois' "Cells". Up-

Upon closer inspection viewers are offered an additional, more intimate, aspect of the work, an interior space which exposes an additional layer of meaning to the work.



Figure 23. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Specimens* (Installation View), 2010.





Figure 24. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, Specimens (Blood Slide Detail),  
Glass, photographs and blood, 2010.

## CONCLUSIONS

The context that I attempted to create in the body of work shown in "Ephemera" is similar to "The Cells" of Bourgeois. It was my goal to find, alter and create objects that conceptually enhanced one another. I was very conscious of creating devices that provided a functional pedestal, while also being fully integrated into the work of sculpture. Although I did use some conventional gallery pedestals, my overall goal was to unify the work conceptually, formally and technically.



Figure 25. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, "Ephemera" (Exhibition View 1), 2010.

In addition to paying close attention to my choice of materials and processes, I also tried to unify the actual exhibition space using sound and leaves. The gallery interior became similar

in its emotional intensity to "The Cells" of Bourgeois or the cabinets of Cornell. The objects I have chosen to work with are loaded with meaning as assigned by culture and history. These objects are also marked by the possession of different owners, and altered in their perception by their use and age. Through these collections of objects, I hope to initiate a conversation with the viewer about identity through the arrangement of objects and images.



Figure 26. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, "Ephemera" (Installation View 2), 2010.

In the future I plan to continue to explore the avenues that I have discovered in my MFA research. I am excited to continue to use my accumulated glass skill set with the techniques I have developed as a contemporary sculptor. My graduate work at Western Carolina University has exposed me to ways of seeing and working with glass as a material that were previously beyond my perception. Combining found and created glass objects has enabled me to explore new

subject matter. Understanding new ways of manipulating found glass has allowed me to me much more versatile as an artist. The use of decals on glass has also broadened my horizons. I am excited to continue exploring this new technique of incorporating imagery directly onto the surface of the glass.



Figure 27. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Life Support* (Instalation View), 2010.



Working with recycled glass has also further expanded my ability to conserve energy, an incredible amount of which is exhausted in traditional glass working. Undoubtedly, I will also continue to explore more traditional methods of glass making, but these new tools will expand my vocabulary as a glass sculptor. Above all, I will continue to explore using glass as the language through which I articulate my experiences and the world around me.



Figure 28. Tracy Michele Kirchmann, *Roots* (Installation View), 2010.

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## APPENDIX

## List of Thesis Images on Compact Disc

1. *Ephemera* Exhibition View 1
2. *Ephemera* Exhibition View 2
3. *Ephemera* Exhibition View 3
4. *Ephemera* Exhibition View 4
5. *Specimens* Installation view
6. *Specimens* Detail 1 Medicine Bottles
7. *Specimens* Detail 2 Bell Jars
8. *Specimens* Detail 3 Blood Slides
9. *Specimens* Detail 4 Coyote Skull
10. *Specimens* Detail 5 Natural Elements
11. *Specimens* Detail 6 Ancestor Magnifier
12. *Roots* Installation View 1
13. *Roots* Installation View 2
14. *Roots* Detail 1 Image in Bottle
15. *Roots* Detail 2 Leaves and Medical Tubing
16. *Mortality* 1
17. *Mortality* Detail 1
18. *Mortality* Detail 2

19. *Growth/Decay Study* Installation View
20. *Growth/Decay Study* Detail 1
21. *UHF*
22. *UHF* Detail 1
23. *Reliquary* Installation View
24. *Reliquary* Detail 1 Grandmothers
25. *Reliquary* Detail 2 Glass Roses
26. *Memory Magnified* Installation View
27. *Memory Magnified* Detail
28. *Time is a River* Installation View
29. *Time is a River* Detail 1
30. *Time is a River* Detail 2
31. *Fortified Habitat* Installation View
32. *Fortified Habitat* Detail 1
33. *Fortified Habitat* Detail 2
34. *Life Support* Installation View
35. *Life Support* Detail 1
36. *The Weight of Potential*
37. *The Weight of Potential* Detail 1
38. *Sustenance* Installation View

39. *Sustenance* Detail 1

40. *Sustenance* Detail 2